

ANNUAL ADDRESS.*

PUBLICITY AND THE PUBLIC MIND.

By DOUGLAS SOUTHALL FREEMAN, PH. D.,
Editor The News Leader, Richmond, Va.

The rapid extension of the field of your beneficent studies, gentlemen, is probably the reason for the selection of a layman to deliver the annual address before you. It is certainly this layman's only justification for accepting that invitation.

As long as insanity remained solely a medical problem any discussion of its social aspects was by the mark. But now that insanity is viewed not less as a disease of society than as a disease of the individual, all that illuminates, even in the slightest degree, those congregate social forces that may superinduce mental disorders is of value in the study of the prevention of insanity. "Manias and delusions," in the now familiar words of Sumner, "are mental phenomena, but they are social. They are diseases of the mind, but they are epidemic" (Folkways [1907 edition], 210).

On this premise I shall endeavor to show you that there exists what I have styled the mind of the reading public; that this shows itself in numerous ways; that it bears an intimate relation to the instincts, has a very definite and necessary place between the mind of the individual and the mind of the crowd, and is of danger to society and of interest to you as psychiatrists when it passes from its proper place and helps transform the mind of the crowd into the mind of the mob. I shall conclude with nothing more substantial than a number of questions for your consideration, and I shall have to plead the employment of a somewhat limited psychological apparatus; but I shall ask your indulgence on the ground that an humble start is better than no beginning. For the subject we are to discuss, strangely enough, is one that has received but scanty attention from the many eminent men who

* Delivered at the seventy-first annual meeting of the American Medico-Psychological Association, Old Point Comfort, Va., May 11-14, 1915.

have developed social psychology—Spencer, Tarde, Le Bon, James, Ross, McDougall, Davis, Cooley and the rest.¹

Modern publicity has developed so subtly and into so many channels of recent years that few of us can appreciate the tremendous influences it brings to bear on our mental processes. The gossip may now sit an hour at her telephone and spread more scandal than the idlest spinster of a generation ago could have disseminated in a month. Congregate city life, spent in trolley-cars that carry advertisements, along streets lined with signs and in homes and offices to which the mail may bring its message three or four times a day, offers infinite possibilities for publicity. Those who need this for themselves or for their products have overlooked few of the many channels. Every railroad, every large corporation, every great industrial establishment, every department of government and every great technical society now has its regular publicity, the end and object of which is to reach and impress the individual through the crowd. One need only read the admirable monographs on advertising—those of Scott, for example—to realize how accurately, how thoroughly and how scientifically the maker of Uneeda Biscuit or the manufacturer of Gold Dust seeks to make his product known to every literate American.

The greatest of the agents of publicity, the newspaper, has acquired dimensions that are almost too large to be impressive when stated in figures. Of the 20,041 daily and weekly newspapers in the United States alone, 2694 are daily. These have a total combined daily circulation of 25,357,000, or approximately one for every four persons in the United States (Ayer's Directory, 1915).² When it is remembered that the average intelligent male

¹ As I shall not have occasion to refer directly to the work again, I must at this point express my indebtedness to Howard's *Social Psychology, An Analytical Reference Syllabus* (Univ. Neb., 1910). This is truly invaluable as a guide to the published literature.

² A very interesting monograph might well be written on a study of the statistics of the press as they illustrate wide reading and a consequent information in respect to government and social progress. The circulation of 25,357,000 mentioned in the text is distributed as follows among the American states: Alabama, 177,000; Arizona, 28,000; Arkansas, 80,000; California, 1,100,000; Colorado, 208,000; Connecticut, 223,000; Delaware, 35,000; District of Columbia, 178,000; Florida, 110,000; Georgia, 247,000; Idaho, 35,000; Illinois, 2,590,000; Indiana, 695,000; Iowa, 539,000; Kansas,

citizen has been shown by investigation to spend 15 minutes the day in reading his newspaper (Scott, *Psychology of Advertising*, 232), that 42 per cent of a selected list read two papers a day, that every paper is read by an average of two persons, and that 3 per cent of the same selected list read all the papers published in a large city, the tremendous scope of newspaper publicity is but barely indicated. What else is there that keeps the average man in touch with the world for an average of 15 minutes the day? What other agency is there, for good or for evil, that can be said to hold and to inform the average mind for that length of time every day of every week?

As a result of a certain misdirection and misunderstanding, upon the details of which it is not necessary here to dwell, we have an American aphorism that "if you see it in the newspapers it isn't so." In this spirit some of us believe that we are immune to the influence of this publicity. It is for this reason, one may well believe, that the subconscious influence exerted by the press is so profound. On the broad ground that we do not believe what the newspapers say, we believe all the more that which we forget we have learned from the press.

As proof of this—if one might pause to bring proof to bear on a question that is but incidental to the general argument—all newspaper men are frequently impressed and sometimes amused to find their own arguments repeated after them as new creations of the mind. Thus an editor may say to-day that the collapse of Russia's offensive is due not to casualties or to lack of men, but to her difficulties in procuring arms and ammunitions—a very

221,000; Kentucky, 247,000; Louisiana, 65,000; Maine, 82,000; Maryland, 380,000; Massachusetts, 1,815,000; Michigan, 780,000; Minnesota, 580,000; Mississippi, 43,000; Missouri, 1,498,000; Montana, 62,000; Nebraska, 305,000; Nevada, 17,000; New Hampshire, 60,000; New Jersey, 387,000; New Mexico, 15,000; New York, 5,355,000; North Carolina, 111,000; Ohio, 1,842,000; Oklahoma, 166,000; Oregon, 102,000; Pennsylvania, 2,488,000; Rhode Island, 133,000; South Carolina, 81,000; South Dakota, 49,000; Tennessee 298,000; Texas, 558,000; Utah, 67,000; Vermont, 44,000; Virginia, 228,000; Washington, 442,000; West Virginia, 129,000; Wisconsin, 464,000; Wyoming, 13,000. With all allowance for the influence of the local weekly press and for the circulation in other states of some of the newspapers that have a very large circulation, how does New York show the influence of its press, and wherein does Nevada suffer or benefit from the fact that it is almost without newspapers?

trite fact, to be sure, but one that may not have been stressed in the news columns—and the editor may cite illustrations and statistics to prove his case. A week or two weeks later the same editor will hear someone begin, "You know, I've been thinking about the reasons for the Russians' failure to employ their strength and I believe it is due—" and he will be regaled with his own facts and approximately his own figures. The new sponsor of this view would be offended if told that he got his views from his daily newspaper, yet such is the fact. Indeed, the very vagueness of the American phrase, "I read somewhere, I forget where," is the most eloquent proof of the impersonal but dominating influence of the press. The same truth is shown in those new phrases which the newspapers coin and the reading public adopts, altogether unconscious of the source of its inspiration. A volume might be written on the new additions made by the newspapers to the popular vocabulary in a decade.

If we concede the strength of this vast publicity we cannot, I think, avoid the conclusion that there is such a state of mind as that of the reading public. It has its peculiarities; it is controlled by rules which it is the ambition of every editor to discover and it shows itself in so many ways as to make *a priori* argument unnecessary. In citing some of these, as proof of the existence of this mind of the reading public, I shall with your permission so group them that you may anticipate from my examples the next point in my argument—that the mind of the reading public bears a close relation to the mind of the crowd and to the mind of the mob, as we know them psychologically, in that it reflects the elemental emotions and the primal instincts of human nature.

Let us first consider those in which there is the suggestion of panic.

I do them no injustice when I say that those who most fear the press of the country are the bankers. This is not because they have anything to conceal, but merely because experience has shown them the tremendous financial danger of an appeal by the press to the fears of the people. To cite two examples: Some time ago a newspaper printed in a foreign language in a large city published a brief, inoffensive item to the effect that the regular examination of a bank was being made. Unfamiliar with the meaning of this, certain foreign depositors who read the notice

became alarmed for their funds. The next morning found a line of them in front of the bank ready to withdraw their deposits; the frenzy of the ignorant aroused the fear of the more intelligent, in precise accordance with Ross' law, and soon there was a run on the bank which forced a closing of its doors and the impairment of its assets. And all because the editor unconsciously aroused the fears of his foreign readers by the publication of a notice that most newspapers have long ago learned to handle as they would dynamite.

Again, the run on the Knickerbocker and Carnegie Trust Companies, which led to the panic of 1907, while it was not due to newspaper publicity, was certainly increased to disastrous proportions by the immediate publication of the news that a crowd was gathering before the doors. On the other hand, who can say but that the disaster might have been averted had some newspaper rushed, to the street in front of the trust companies, an extra edition in which good authorities were quoted to the effect that the institutions were solvent and could pay their obligations.

Very similar in character is the effect of modern publicity on the public demand for commodities. For example, during the early days of the war a newspaper of my acquaintance printed on its front page an article in which an anonymous sugar refiner was quoted as saying, with many qualifications and provisos, that sugar might reach 15 cents the pound. The desk man in that particular newspaper office saw the "scare" in the item and prefaced it with a flaring headline, "Sugar 15 Cents a Pound." The person who read the entire story would, of course, realize that if that price was to be reached a number of things, all remote possibilities, had to come to pass. But owing to what Ross has called the American habit of paragraphesis, the busy housewives, or some of them at least, read only the first paragraph, "the lead." The result was a rush on the retail groceries and cut-rate tea stores that drove sugar from $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 11 cents. One woman, whose normal family consumption of sugar was about seven pounds the week, did not rest content until she had purchased 300 pounds—at almost twice the price she would have had to pay three days later.

I have cited these simple and homely illustrations because it has seemed to me that they show as strikingly as do the money panics so well described by Conant, Gibson, Juglar and Sprague, or the

classic waves of speculation mentioned by Sidis (*Psychology of Suggestion*, 343-49), the readiness with which the public mind, under the stimulus of the press, can be led to acts for which there is no reasoning or reasonable explanation. Every newspaper has it in its power to reproduce on a small scale the Mississippi bubble or the tulip mania.

Close akin to these panics and like evidence of the existence of this mind of the reading public are those curious morality waves that sweep every country from time to time. In the seventeenth century it may be a Salem witchcraft frenzy, so carefully analyzed by Upham (*Salem Witchcraft*) and by Sidis (*op. cit.*, 331 ff.); in the twentieth it may be, as now it is, the anti-vice crusades that are sweeping the country. The one was an appeal to the superstition and fear of the New Englander; the other makes a more detailed emotional and a scarcely less striking instinctive appeal to the fear of the intelligent city man. The one had the advantage of an historical priority of 200 years; the other offsets this by having at its command newspapers that fan to flame the natural concern of a chivalrous people for the safety of its women. Salem witches were tried by public opinion rather than by law; vice crusades—however much they may accomplish for good—are fundamentally the sentence imposed by the mind of the reading public. For how could they be organized in our complex society without the newspaper to crystallize and, sometimes, to misdirect the mind of its readers?

Of the same type, too, are the fears that come of some particular agent or means of destruction—crazes that are analogous to the “Great Fear” of 1789, that national hysteria so graphically described by Morse Stephens (*French Revolution*, I, 178-79). The white slavery excitement is a case in point; the concern over the discovery and reported use of the Maxim silencer is another; the most striking by every count was the veritable mania that swept New York during the winter of 1913-14 as a result of the so-called “poisoned needle” disclosures. The last named I would especially commend to you for study, as it illustrates on a large scale a popular hysteria that would seem to have a connection with those individual cases of hysteria that sometimes lead to acute mania. Incidentally, the “poisoned needle” affair would seem to disprove Ross’ first law of crazes—“the craze takes time to

develop to its height" (Ross, *Social Psychology*, 76), and to show how quickly the mind of reading public, through the wider circulation of newspapers, may become distraught with a sudden fear.

Taken together, it seems to me that these and like examples of the same character that have doubtless occurred to you illustrate the ready assertion of the emotion of fear and, indeed, of the instinct of flight, in the mind of the people as they read the papers—to use the words "emotion" and "instinct" as they are defined by McDougall (*Introduction to Social Psychology* [1909 edition], 49). Men withdraw their money from bank or dump their holdings on a declining market from the same instinct that prompts them to flee from a burning house; they become frenzied over vice crusades or white slavery or poisoned needles just as they became madmen from fear of witchcraft. And they act, not from the impulse given them by commingling on the street corners to be harangued by some wild orator, but from the suggestion conveyed to them primarily through the modern means of publicity. They may become a mob; they begin as a reading public. And the fears which but vaguely suggest themselves to the average mind find, in the columns of a certain type of newspaper, constant and exciting stimuli through "confirmation" of the wildest and most improbable stories.

But lest you think that this indictment applies to all newspapers, or is the constant fault of many, let me present the other side of the case and remind you that often the newspapers stabilize the public mind and allay the rumors they are sometimes charged with circulating. I cannot do better than cite, as proof of this, a single occurrence of comparatively recent date. The newspapers of Butte, Montana, were so threatened and bullied by labor organizations that they decided to give the city a taste of life without newspapers and, by agreement among themselves, all of them suspended. The result was a return to a "state of nature" and, incidentally, almost the bankruptcy of the two leading dry goods stores. The reason was not merely their inability to advertise their goods, but their utter impotence in the face of a rumor that smallpox had broken out among their clerks, rendering it dangerous to visit the stores. The newspapers, of course, could have laughed this rumor out of credence in a single issue.

Closely allied with these social phenomena that illustrate the emotion of fear and the instinct of flight are those in which the tendency of the public to exaggerate is asserted in a most striking but often in a somewhat confusing manner. So far as I know there has been no adequate analysis of these phenomena, but to you, as alienists, they are certainly important. The active, impatient and imaginative American mind—somewhat misinterpreted, I take it, by Le Bon (*The Psychology of Peoples*, 140)—is almost Gallic in its fondness for excitement and its readiness to jump to conclusions. It was perhaps never better judged than by one of the fathers of modern yellow-journalism who told his chief editors always to “feature” on their front page daily a story which, when he read it, would make the average man cry “Gee, whiz!” This “gee-whiz” mind is also strangely pessimistic for that of a people so young and so hopeful. The average man seldom hears any rumor that he does not construe into the worst disaster of that particular type for which he has any recent parallel. If a fire breaks out rumor at once declares it “the biggest fire” since such-and-such a well-remembered conflagration. If a drought is observed, it is certain to be the “worst drought” since such-and-such a year; if times are hard, they are destined to be “as bad as 1893” or as the direst period of depression recently observed. There must, likewise, always be taken into account the inclination of a certain type of mind deliberately or otherwise to magnify any report it receives and transmits to someone else. If a business house is having a dull season, gossip to that effect will soon have the concern on the verge of bankruptcy; if a man makes the least misstep, he is tried, convicted and sentenced by public opinion before the first evidence is presented. The simplicity of this process, its speed and its most alarming aspects are only discernible, I suspect, from the inside of a newspaper office, to which, in the nature of things, come all the requests of the public for the confirmation of the most absurd rumors. To cite a very simple illustration, we have in Richmond a venerable police justice who is a most unusual character—known to practically every one in the city. He has been in bad health for some years and has been forced to take several vacations for recuperation. I think I am within the facts when I state that not one of these vacations has passed but that at some

time during its progress the newspapers have suddenly been deluged with requests to know if the report be true that the judge is dead.

It is precisely the same throughout the country, I believe, when the President goes on a journey. If this be well advertised, and especially if it involves attendance upon any exposition or great gathering, the chances are that the newspapers will suddenly begin to receive inquiries if it is a fact that he has been assassinated. The reason, of course, is the recollection of President McKinley's fatal visit to Buffalo.*

These phenomena are of some interest in their origin and they offer a curious intermingling of the instincts of fear or apprehension, of curiosity and of the desires to anticipate conclusions and to be the first to report a fact of interest. But to you, gentlemen, they must primarily be of interest in the questions they raise in your mind as to the influence of the mind of the reading public on the disordered mind of the individual. If the people are so prone to exaggerate and to anticipate the worst, what may be the suggestive influence of the many on the few? Incidentally, these phenomena are of the greatest international moment at this time, inasmuch as the danger of war lies not in the possibility that the President will make a mistake or that Germany will assume a belligerent attitude, but rather that the newspapers may so fix the mind of the reading public and so work on its pessimism and impulse to exaggerate that it may force the government to war because the people believe that war is to be. It was so, as we all remember, in 1898.

We come now, with your permission, to that group of phenomena which, it seems to me, illustrates more clearly than any other the existence of the mind of the reading public and affords us the best basis for that analysis which is to show us the psycho-

* It so happened that the day after this paragraph was written, there came curious confirmation of the point made in the text through a wild rumor on the "ticker service" that President Wilson had been assassinated. The reason for this rumor was, of course, the general apprehension of the serious events that would follow the death of the President at the time when excitement over the Lusitania incident was at the highest. Incidentally, the stockmarket broke four points on some issues before a denial from Washington could be had.

logical importance of a proper direction of that mind. I refer to the phenomena in which the inclination to imitate is the dominant factor, and I do not think it necessary, for our purpose, to decide between the views of Tarde (*Lois d'Imitation*) and those of McDougall as to whether this is an instinct or a non-specific innate tendency. The distinction in any event is so small as scarcely to be worth while.

For convenience of discussion I shall ask you to let me divide these phenomena into four subdivisions—religious, criminal and suicidal, fashional, and recreational.

In referring to the imitative aspect of religious revivals, I dare not follow the interesting trail blazed by Sumner regarding religious customs (*Folkways*), and I trust I shall say nothing to give a material turn to that "change of heart" in which I most earnestly believe. But we must all agree that there have been many emotional upheavals in which the instinct to imitate played a very large part. The children's crusade was one (Ireland in *Journal of Mental Science*, 52, 745, etc. See other references quoted by Howard, op. cit.). The famous Kentucky revival, so often mentioned in the reference works on social psychology, was another (McMaster, *History People United States*, quoted in Ross, op. cit., 50 ff.). A third we see in the remarkable meetings held by Mr. Sunday. If it be true, as claimed, that Mr. Sunday has been the means of converting more persons than any minister since apostolic times, we must attribute the fact not only to the remarkable powers of the man, but to the skill with which he uses every means to arouse the imitative instinct. It is in no empty desire for self-glorification that he employs some of the best press agents in America ; it is not to attract attention to his own belligerent personality that he asks to be given the whole front pages of the newspapers in the cities where he holds his meetings. He knows that there is a mind of the reading public and that the instinct to imitate can best be aroused by filling the minds of the people, before they come to his tabernacle, with the subtle suggestion of an invincible spiritual and emotional appeal. In no desire to criticise him or to pass judgment on his methods, I submit that Mr. Sunday is a most successful revivalist because he is, among other things, an exceptionally shrewd psychologist. Thanks to modern methods of publicity, he has half his work done for him before he mounts the platform.

It may seem somewhat incongruous to turn immediately from the mind of the reading public as shown in religious revivals to the mind of the reading public as shown in suicide and criminal waves; but they rest, in part at least, on the same psychological foundation. There are few, if any, more striking social phenomena than the contagion of suicide. Seeck (*Untergang der Antiken Weld*, I, 258 ff.) attributed the suicide waves of ancient Rome to that "pessimism" which "took possession of the old peoples at the beginning of the Christian era"; modern writers have found somewhat the same explanation for the high suicide rates of certain European countries. Whether this can possibly be the case in so young a country as America it is not my task to discuss; but that there is a strong imitative factor in the methods of suicide is a truism among observant newspaper men. All of us know that if a particular form of suicide is reported with dramatic detail in the newspapers, the next suicide and probably the next group of suicides in the same city will be by the same means, within certain limitations, to which I shall presently call attention. Sometimes, if a suicide be given unusual publicity, it will be imitated throughout the country. The recent bichloride of mercury wave was, by all counts, the most striking example of this kind that has occurred during my recollection. You will remember its origin and progress. A Georgia business man took corrosive sublimate by accident and, after he was told that he would certainly die, he went very deliberately about setting his house in order. As you doubtless observed at the time, the facts were not as they were dressed by some conscienceless and imaginative reporter, for a man who was dying of bichloride poisoning could not entertain his friends at banquets and speculate, Cato-like, on his coming dissolution. But the dramatic element in the case aroused the imitative instinct among those who contemplated suicide and found it easy to procure bichloride tablets. The result was a most alarming wave of poisoning with this compound. I counted twenty reports of such suicides in a few weeks, and was not surprised when a leading medical organization felt called on to tell the public (through its publicity bureau of course) that if persons would insist upon committing suicide they could do so with much less trouble and torture than by taking bichloride tablets. The same waves are to be observed in suicides from

shooting, drowning and the like, with carbolic poisoning always to the fore, primarily because this acid is universally known and can usually be purchased without difficulty, thanks to our clumsy drug-laws.

The same instinctive tendencies show themselves in crime, both individual and communal. In a Tennessee city, for example, a well-dressed woman walked into a barber-shop with a revolver concealed in her muff and, calmly drawing the weapon, shot her lover to death as he sat in the barber's chair. The unusual character of the crime and the strange setting placed the story on the front pages of the papers of that city. The appeal to the imitative impulse was strong; within a few weeks two colored women, procuring muffs and following the precise details, shot their lovers in barbers' chairs.

I need scarcely illustrate, in this classification, the now familiar psychology of lynchings. Le Bon (*The Crowd*) has explained how, in such an outbreak of law defiance, the mind of the mob is baser and more criminal than that of the individuals composing it; Ross has shown how the worst elements dominate (*op. cit.*); a number of observers have accurately attributed this to the instinct of men to imitate, through the mere stimulus of the crowd, the violence of the worst. The point I wish to make is that lynchings have usually occurred where the public mind was aroused by the horrible details of the tragedy, as reported in the newspapers, and by the unconscious suggestions of violence in the presumably accurate published statements that such action was considered in the crowds that "gathered on the street corners." There must, in a word, always be a stimulus; it is more often the unintentional hint of the newspaper than the cry of some desperado, "Come on, let's lynch him." On the other hand, I submit, subject to correction by those whose observation has been wider, that few lynchings ever occur where the press can state at the outset, on proper authority from the executive, that special deputies will be sworn in or that the militia will be called out to enforce the law. The fact that Virginia has not had a lynching in almost 20 years is to be attributed, I think, to the emphasis of the newspapers on this point, and to the uniform promptness of our Governors in declaring that the whole force of the commonwealth would be exerted to prevent violence.

The chief deterrent in the imitation of suicides, needless to say, is the horrible suffering of the victim on his non-success, or, in the case of crime, the immediate punishment of the perpetrator. This is of course nothing more than plain common sense, familiar to all; but it is illustrated sometimes in a manner that may escape observation. In suicides, in particular, there is always in the disordered mind of the would-be self-destroyer a desire to do something dramatic and to make way with himself with the least possible suffering. In such instances the prospect of defeat or of suffering is usually a deterrent from the imitation of a particular method. Hedda Gabler's horror at the means of Eilert Lovborg's death, as told by Ibsen, is psychologically sound (*Hedda Gabler, Archer's Translation, Ibsen's Collected Works [1909 edition], 10, 176*). We see like instances almost daily in our newspapers. Not many months ago, for example, an unhappy woman attempted to jump to death from a high building in one of our cities. She was restrained, was arrested and was given most undesirable publicity. Only one woman seemed determined, in the face of this warning, to attempt the same act in the same manner. Going to the identical building, she threw herself down and was picked up from the concrete court of the building an unrecognizable mass of flesh and broken bones. The newspapers which had printed the failure of the former woman to commit suicide published the story of the latter woman's success and gave in all detail the horrible picture of the body. It may safely be ventured that none who read that story will be inclined to imitate the victim; and it may also be stated with some assurance that had the Georgia newspapers presented to their readers the suffering rather than the stoicism of the citizen who started the bichloride wave by accident, that form of suicide would not have been repeated.

As for the deterrent influence of punishment, who has read of a second lynching in a town where members of a lynching party were convicted even of manslaughter? And who fancies that another court tragedy will follow the conviction and execution of the Allens?

Ere I pass from this phase of the subject, permit me to suggest that there must be material for very fruitful investigations along these lines in your suicidal and homicidal wards. Does the law of

imitation apply there as fully as in the normal walks of society, where the vast and varied influences of publicity are at work?

The imitation shown in fashions presents many striking illustrations of the mind of the crowd and of the mind of the reading public, but as these are all familiar, I need only dwell on one fact, that the publicity which makes fashions is, within certain bounds, the publicity that destroys them. We owe the curious "tight skirt" scarcely less to the necessities of modistes than to the emphasis placed upon its fashionable character by the women's periodicals and the newspapers. We owe its disappearance not only to those whose income depended upon making something else popular, but also to the newspapers which ridiculed it. The imitative rule in dress is, of course, to carry any fashion to the extreme—as witness crinoline, the large sleeves of the nineties, and the merry widow hats of five years ago; but the cartoonist can destroy what the designer makes. Goldberg is not less potent as an arbiter of fashions than Chéruit or Lacroix, and the shops of the Paris boulevards would close in a season were it not for the women's pages of the dailies.

The same is true of the amusement manias, the psychology of which is so well known as not to need discussion here. One need only remark that in this respect the instincts which showed themselves in the dance manias of the middle ages, so graphically described by Hecker (*Dance Manias of the Middle Ages*), have not changed in the slightest in 400 years. On the contrary, it is perhaps safe to say that Ross' law on this subject could not be stated with so much precision (*op. cit.*, 76 ff.) were it not that what is done at Churchill's to-night can be known throughout America to-morrow, or that Mrs. Vernon Castle's newest step can be reproduced in every motion-picture theater in the country almost before her first New York pupils have been perfected in it. As for baseball, the "world's series score-boards" in all the American cities show how the newspapers have not only created an interest, but have actually visualized a scene that sets thousands of men to cheering.

In all of this we see what Tarde has so beautifully described in his classic description of the spread of the domestic arts—"the unheard-of sight of many vast nations feeling, at the same time and in about the same way, the beautiful and the ugly, good and

evil, admiring or mocking at the same pictures, the same novels, the same dramas, the same operas, applauding the same acts of virtue or becoming indignant over the same crimes, crimes that are made public by the daily press in the four corners of the globe at the same time." (Tarde, *Law of Imitation* [Parsons' translation], 345.)

The confines of this paper make it impossible for me to further illustrate the manner and extent to which the reading of the people shapes the mind of the people. But I trust I have said enough to show you that this publicity sometimes determines a state of mind in the reading public and that its effects on the people as a whole may be different from its effects on perhaps any single reader. I think it may even be said—though it is not necessary for our argument—that the congregate effect is greater than the sum of the effects on the individuals. This is at least in accord with what we know of social psychology.

But if we admit so much, what then? The important task—for you, gentlemen, the only useful task—is to ascertain the bearing of this publicity on the mental life of the people, to determine how the mind of the reading public affects the minds of those of unstable mentality, and to see what may be necessary to keep sane the mind of this reading public.

Psychologically, the aim of the press must be to link the individual with the crowd, and to unify the mind of its reading public. This is necessary for good government; it is necessary to protect the people from unscrupulous politicians; it is necessary to give expression to that which we call the "will of the people"; it is necessary to safeguard public interests from the indolence of the individual. Were the newspapers to fail in this, we should be an army which had no outposts, a city with no watchmen on the tower. We have left so much to the newspapers and have become so dependent upon them, as our cities have grown, that they are almost as necessary a public utility as a system of transportation, and almost as essential to political health as are water supplies and sewage disposal to public health. If we deny their mission to unify, indeed to create, the mind of the reading public, we take from the newspapers their most useful mission.

On the other hand, the newspapers must keep the mind of the crowd from becoming the mind of the mob, or, to state the case

in its psychological sense, must keep the instincts from overcoming the sentiments, the reason and the emotions of the people. To illustrate this very simply, the press must so consolidate the mind of the voters and so inform them through the newspapers they read, that the people will not give away their valuable franchises for naught; but the press must restrain the very forces it has set in motion, lest it encourage that corporation baiting which leads to the overthrow of property rights and brings us to the verge of anarchy. The press must, to take still another case, so arouse careless individuals that they will demand good government and hold to a strict accountability the public officers they choose; but the newspapers must repress that instinct which would, in correcting one abuse, open the way to another and a worse.

To direct the mind of the reading public and to keep it from becoming the mind of the mob—this is a task in which, it seems to me, the press of America needs your assistance. We have had the preventives of the mob mind pointed out for us by Ross and McDougall—education, better teaching and leadership, a better press, a better literature, a better environment, more stable institutions and more strongly emphasized family life. But these are the standing remedies for all social ills. If we are really to take preventive measures, we must understand more completely the method of infection. We must know precisely what there is in some newspapers that drives men mad and foments the mob spirit. We must go to individual cases and must ascertain, if it be possible to do so, just what influence from the mind of the reading public may upset the mind of the man who comes sooner or later to your hospitals. Editors see the danger and sometimes they see the victims—men who become anarchists from reading of social injustice, men who have delusions that seem to bear a very close relation to their newspaper reading. We need to investigate every such case carefully and to weigh the newspaper in its relation to the social causation of insanity. How much of the excitement that stirs, or is synchronous with mental disorders is due to the newspapers? How many cases have you in your hospitals whose mania could, upon investigation, be traced to the suggestion of the press or to the mind of the reading public? What do we print that is dangerous and what may we print that is wholesome? How can we do the work we owe society and government without

danger to those we would serve? How far must we go in preparing newspapers that are "mentally safe," not only for the strongest but for the frailest mind?

I warned you that I should conclude this paper with nothing more stable than questions, and now I have asked them. They may be worth your answering. They may make it of some interest to you to investigate your patients' history for the possible influence of the mind of the reading public.

For who knows what we may find of the social causes of insanity? We are on the frontier of a new continent. Just as the methods you employ to-day are as different from the regimen of the straight-jacket as the democracy of America is different from the autocracy of a Sforza, so it may be that in prevention, as in treatment, we shall find new angles of approach and deep-seated causes as yet beyond our vision. I do not know. I should be presumptuous to speculate. But I cannot think it will be futile for you to delve with master hands where I have but touched with amateurish fingers, and to ascertain if there be not some connection between those instincts which are wont to warp the mind of the reading public and those mental disorders which are but exaggerated instincts.